

- Funding Will Alleviate District Budget Crunch, Lower Burden on Local Taxpayers -

Fort Montgomery, NY - Standing with District Superintendent Debra Jackson in a science classroom at James I. O'Neill High School, U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-Dover) announced \$800,000 in new federal funding to support science and technology education in the Highland Falls - Fort Montgomery Central School District. Rep. Hall and Dr. Jackson were joined by James O'Neill students, teachers, and school administrators, who came to support Hall's efforts on behalf of their district.

Highlands Falls has suffered from acute underfunding due to the high percentage of taxable land held by the Federal Government. More than 75% of the school district's taxable land is owned by the federal government and more than 17% is comprised of state parklands. This leaves only 7% of land available for taxation to support school funding. At the same time, the district is responsible for the education of the children living at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Because of this, the district receives Federal Impact Aid through the Department of Education.

However, in 1997 Congress acted to limit the levels of funding that could be allocated for Highland Falls. A cap was placed on the additional payment, sharply limiting the rate at which it can be increased in a given year. As a result, Highland Falls has fallen sharply behind other Impact Aid school districts and finds itself in a yearly shortfall that threatens severe cuts in services.

While seeking a permanent solution to the school district's unique situation, Congressman Hall has worked to find short-term solutions that would bring additional federal funding to the school. Today, Congressman Hall detailed \$800,000 that he has secured in Appropriation legislation for science technology education in the district, funding that will also help reduce the district's budget crises, help reduce the burden on local tax payers, and allow the district to shift current funding elsewhere to support educational programming across at the district's schools.

"The children of Highland Falls and Fort Montgomery deserve an education that will allow them to achieve everything that they are capable of. Their schools have done more with less for much too long," Rep. Hall said. "The funding I'm announcing today will allow the district to build a science and technology program that will open the doors to educational and job opportunities for the district's students."

Recognizing that a long-term solution is needed to ensure that Highland Falls can continue to educate the children of West Point, Rep. Hall has proposed legislation that would remove the existing cap on the additional payments to Highland Falls, while reducing their entitlement. This will ensure that Highland Falls will no longer face a yearly shortfall, while still allowing other Impact Aid schools to receive necessary funding.

"The funding we're announcing today is part of a larger effort to support the incredible work being done by the Highland Falls school district staff under extremely difficult conditions," Rep. Hall added.

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